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Part-time instructors make up an increasingly large percentage of college faculty. In English departments, part-time instructors take on the least prestigious and most demanding work--the teaching of writing--for low wages and without job security or professional recognition. This unfair treatment stems from the belief that the study and teaching of literature rather than writing and rhetoric are the business of English departments. The study and teaching of writing are considered too functional and unscholarly to deserve departmental recognition. As a result, part-time writing teachers are punished because they teach composition and because, given the time-consuming nature of writing instruction, they find it difficult to publish. This self-perpetuating segregation makes the academic tenure system appear more exploitative of labor and indifferent to talent than are businesses. Although two-year colleges employ the largest number of part-time teachers, these institutions may eventually give quality part-time writing instruction the recognition it deserves, since two-year colleges offer more courses in writing than in literature, reward excellence in teaching rather than in scholarship, and are most responsive to changing educational demands. (Author/HTH)

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Money, Status and Composition:

Assumptions Underlying the Crisis of Part-Time Instruction

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ABSTRACT

Part-time instructors make up an increasingly large percentage of college faculty. In English departments, the part-time instructor takes on the least prestigious and most demanding work --the teaching of writing-- for low wages and without job security or professional recognition. This unfair treatment stems from the belief that the study and teaching of literature, not of writing and rhetoric, are the business of English departments. The study and teaching of writing are considered too functional and unscholarly to deserve departmental recognition. As a result, part-time writing teachers are punished because they work at composition and because, given the time-consuming nature of writing instruction, they find it difficult to publish. This self-perpetuating segregation makes the academic tenure system seem more exploitive of labor and indifferent to talent than businesses are. Although two-year colleges employ the largest numbers of part-time teachers, these institutions may eventually give quality part-time writing instruction the recognition it deserves, since two-year colleges offer more courses in writing than in literature, reward excellence in teaching rather than scholarship, and since community colleges are most resporsive to changing educational demands.

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As a full-time instructor at a community college, I am now primarily a teacher of writing. I entered graduate school expecting to spend my career working with literature. I wanted a career teaching English because I loved literature and because I believed that the academic world was a better, fairer place, and could offer me a more personally rewarding career than one in business. I was also convinced that businessmen were venial and exploitive money-grubbers, snobbish and inhumane.

I had chosen (in the terms of a dream vision I had read in one of my medieval literature seminars) the contemplative, not the active life. The medieval poet-scholar of the dream vision had made a similar choice between academia and business. At the crossroads, the active life led to fame, power, and wealth. However, it also led to temptation: money itself, root of all evil, was addictive. The contemplative life was clearly the road to virtue. (The poet thoughtfully included an angel at the crossroads to point the way, in case his reader missed the hint.) Scholarship meant seclusion, but a higher calling, free from worldly temptations, unexploitive, a life in a community of colleagues.

I went to graduate school in pursuit of the contemplative life. I found it in graduate courses, in textual study, in literary translation. I also found it in teaching the composition and technical writing courses which paid my way. I knew that writing

and rhetoric had an ancient and honorable place in the humanist tradition, and I enjoyed the opportunity to study rhetoric as well as to teach it. Besides, the teaching of writing helped me temper my own prose, taught me to teach, and helped me apply rhetorical insights to my critical work.

I was much less happy when, Ph.D. in hand, I found that I was qualified to fill a role as a writing instructor that shattered my illusions about academic life. Most of the jobs I found were for part-time employment, that is, less salary for a heavy teaching load, few or no benefits, and no departmental voice in policy or decision-making, no job security, and few (if any) benefits. As a part-time and non-tenure track teacher, I was shocked to find how little the departments in which I taught cared about the quality of my work and how little supervision or administrative support I received, and how reluctant department members were to have anything to do with me. I was, after all, not a colleague. While working at the publications which I hoped would win me a <u>real</u> job, I found that with each passing year as a teacher of writing, my chances of obtaining a full-time position in an English department decreased. Part-time teaching was not the contemplative life I had wanted.

Such openings in English departments are not a new phenomenon. Part-time (and more recently, non tenure-track) teaching roles have made writing instruction a special kind of serfdom, supporting research positions in specialized areas of literature.[1] The jobs advertised for non-tenure track and part-time openings in today's <u>Chronicle</u> and <u>Job Information List</u> differ little from similar openings of fifty years ago. The important difference,

however, lies in the growing demand for courses in writing and the sheer numbers of part-time instructors who teach them.

According to AAUP, the numbers of part-time college instructors in all academic disciplines have been rising at a dramatic rate since the early 1970s. The major employers of this market of disposable writing teachers have been two-year institutions, whose use of part-time faculty rose by a 51% between 1972 and 1977.[2] Jack Friedlander, of the Centre for the Study of Community Colleges, estimates that between 1971 and 1977 this increase in the use of part-time faculty in two-year colleges between 1971 and 1977 was closer to 140%.[3] Full-time faculty growth for both two-year and four year institutions was 9% between 1972 and 1977; numbers of part-time faculty grew by 50%.[4] The rate of increase of part-time faculty members is expected to grow, particularly in high-enrollment disciplines such as English.

In English departments, the part-time faculty consistently teaches writing: the growing numbers of developmental courses, composition, the increasingly popular technical writing. Why not? Writing courses are hard work, requiring careful preparation, student conferences, and, most time consuming, most frustrating, long hours of tedious grading. A heavy schedule of this kind of teaching virtually eliminates time for serious research and writing. Research and publication outside the field of literature seem to receive less departmental recognition, despite existing areas of composition and rhetorical research, the growing interest in professional organizations in these areas, and the increasing number of granting sources for study. Without

rewards and with no chance of promotion, the part-time teaching of writing becomes a self-perpetuating trap.

Exploitive? Like More's Utopia, English departments offer those lucky few tenured and tenure-track members full citizenship in an ideal community. Here equal citizens share the work and the the rewards. Like Utopia, however, the ideal contemplative realm of the English department is supported by a group of non-citizens who perform the work too demeaning and dirty for the citizens to consider. Part-time and non-tenure-track instructors are not franchised in decision making. They generally have no voice in departmental policy and are employed in ways that prevent them from moving into citizenship in the departments in which they serve. Part-time instructors receive salaries which average 20% less than the salaries of full-time instructors, and few or no benefits.[5]

As full-time positions in literature grow fewer in number, the numbers of part-time and non-tenure positions grow.[6] An alarming new development suggests that the gap between untenured generalists and tenured specialists will grow as retiring professors are replaced by short-term or part-time instructors.[7] It would seem that the contemplative life is available to fewer and fewer, and at greater personal and professional cost to the people who support it. As the part-time faculty demands rights and benefits, opposition grows from full-time and tenured faculty, who feel their own positions threatened.[8]

I do not wish to attack the academic tradition of the liberal arts, the study of literature, or the contemplative life. However, I believe that the career devoted to research,

publication and teaching in specialised literary areas is available to too few among us and at too great an ethical cost. The contemplative life fails to recognise a change in the nature of college education and the economy: as more students enter colleges and demand college degrees, educators encounter a more diverse profile of student preparation for entry level courses. As educators, we are increasingly asked to meet immediate student needs, to compensate for deficiencies in skills, and to provide skills appropriate to the job market.

For all these reasons, I wish to propose the juncture of the active and contemplative lives in English departments. If we are to compete for our share of educational demand, we must design curriculum in writing and literature in ways that meet student needs. In our departments we must give sanction and status to the study of rhetoric and composition, and we must accept teachers of writing, including part-time instructors, as colleagues.

Whether we like it or not, colleges and universities have become more and more like businesses, and the increase in skills courses and practical courses like technical and business writing reflect the needs of the student-consumer. The part-time and non-tenure-track instructor provides the means to meeting those ends. If Naisbitt's Megatrends prediction is correct, the university of the future will meet budgetary needs by research associations with business and industry. Colleges will need to adapt to meet the needs of a more diverse enrollment, especially of returning students and career changers. If curriculum must expand to meet the needs of this new audience, and if numbers of sections must

fluctuate to meet changing enrollments, part-time instruction will remain an institution. Part-time teachers provide the only affordable way for colleges to meet the demand for sections of writing instruction. The real issue is an ethical one: how can colleges acknowledge part-time instructors and the important service they perform, integrate writing and writing teachers, full-time and part-time, into English departments?

The community college seems to provide both the ability to adapt to educational needs and the possibility of recognising the services of its part-time faculty. Full-time faculty at two-year colleges spent 70% of their workload teaching writing courses, double the number of writing courses taught by writing teachers at other institutions.[11] The non-elitist, vocational nature of the community college dictates its heavily service-oriented English curriculum, and the community college's need to meet community educational needs requires that it offer sections to meet rising or falling enrollments. For all of these reasons, community colleges are, as I indicated earlier, the largest employers of part-time faculty. Since full-time and part-time faculty share in the teaching of writing, and since the community college stresses teaching excellence rather than research, part-time and full-time faculty have more in common as colleagues. The part-time instructor who also works full-time at a nonacademic job serves as a link between college and community, and the part-time instructor in general has special insights into the needs and problems of the part-time student.

Community colleges have begun to acknowledge part-time faculty in a number of ways. In a widespread trend, two-year college administrators have begun to integrate part-time faculty into

college life through handbooks, orientations, mentoring systems, and faculty development programs. Although part-time salaries remain low, some colleges use longevity pay as an incentive for part-time instructors to remain with the college for longer periods. Rewards for teaching excellence, better pay, widespread benefits, contractual bargaining power, and the opportunity to participate in departmental decision-making must follow. After all, the numbers of part-time faculty and the importance of their economic and educational role in the two-year institution give them influence. Like any other large and influential labor force, part-time faculty can use organization and negotiation to win the benefits it deserves.

I wish that the full-time contemplative life of literary teaching and study could still be a possibility for more of us, and that English departments could better acknowledge the validity of the study of rhetoric and writing. I am convinced that specialised literary study has come to exist only at the expense of the providers of writing instruction and to the detriment of the large numbers of students who require our services. As teachers of writing, full-time and part-time, we must work to develop our professional ties with organizations, with businesses, and with legislators. We must promote research and development to improve our effectiveness and to expand our understanding of our work. We must urge our institutions to support professional development for all of our staff members, full-time and part-time, to allow us to continue to learn. Writing instruction is demanding but valuable work; it may

provide a way for the active and the contemplative lives to meet --ethically -- to learn and to serve together as colleagues.

ENDNOTES

1. Szilak, p. 26.
2. AAUP, "Status of Part-Time Faculty", p. 30.
3. Grant, p. 19.
4. AAUP, "Status of Part-Time Faculty", p. 30.
5. Cohen and Brawer, p. 56.
6. Eliason, p. 7.
7. McLeod, p. 34.
8. AAUP, "On Full-Time, Non Tenure-Track Appointments", p. 269.
9. Naisbitt, p. 93.
10. Naisbitt, p. 37.
11. Witte, p. 11.

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